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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of the meanings of political affect, political cognition, and political participation is important in understanding U.S. youths' socio-civic beliefs, values, and behaviors. Political affect refers to loyalty and affection for a political system. Research studies indicate that, even if youth have hostile feelings about how the U.S. government is currently administered, they still hold positive affections for the system as a whole. Political cognition encompasses knowledge of facts, current socio-political issues, and basic democratic principles. Few young people rank in the upper quartile on any political cognition knowledge measure. However, they score as well as similarly educated adults, appear to be increasingly interested in national issues, and have difficulty articulating the meanings of democratic principles. Political participation refers to government involvement and citizen participation with groups, movements, and causes. Students are most likely to participate in school-related activities, the work force, and in volunteer groups. Youths' political views tend to be both conservative and liberal, but census figures indicate that less than 40 percent of 18-20 year olds vote. This may be due to indifference rather than alienation. Tables are included, and 35 footnotes are appended. (JHP)

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AMERICAN YOUTH: THEIR SOCIO-CIVIC BELIEFS,
VALUES, AND BEHAVIOR

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Introduction

Answering the question "What are the major characteristics of the socio-civic beliefs, values, and behavior of American youth" is no easy task, for at least two reasons. First, American youth are an amalgam of heterogenous groups which include high school students and high school dropouts, blue and pink collar workers, the unemployed, teenage parents, racial and ethnic minorities, and college students. Secondly, recent research about young people between the ages of 15 and 22 has resulted in such a jumble of findings that land mines await anyone who has the audacity to try to describe their often complicated and sometimes contradictory views - especially in 30 minutes time. Nonetheless - and despite the difficulties inherent in the question - it is an important question, a foundational one. Before the larger issues of increasing civic competence and civic responsibility can be addressed, some assessment of the present is necessary.

At the outset of this discussion, it is well to recall that one of the major strands of normative democratic theory is that citizens should be involved in the democratic process.¹ Perhaps nowhere has this tenet permeated the political culture more than in the United States. Here, terms such as good citizen, concerned citizen, and involved citizen are used almost interchangeably. Active citizenship, therefore, has attained the status of a cultural imperative, an identifiable American phenomenon potent enough to establish and maintain clear norms for citizen behavior.² Just what this cultural imperative means is explained in a recently completed Rutgers University study.

In practical terms, the cultural imperative demands that citizens demonstrate their commitment to the polity in at least three different ways:

First, citizens must feel loyalty to the polity or affection for the system. Patriotism might be one manifestation of such loyalty. Willingly obeying the country's laws might be another.

Second, citizens must be sufficiently well-informed to discharge their citizenship duties meaningfully. Information generally includes knowledge of the political system and how it operates, as well as knowledge of current happenings, conflicts, and possible solutions. The democratic citizen is expected to take an interest in all of these.

Third, being a loyal and informed citizen constitutes only the beginning of democratic citizenship: the democratic citizen is also a participatory one. He not only elects representatives, but helps them rule. In short, the democratic citizen must not think that he has discharged his duties simply by being loyal, informed, and voting. He must continue to be active between elections in order to exercise continuous control over government. Thus, the cultural imperative expects the good citizen to be involved along three different dimensions at once: affective, cognitive, and participatory.³

Political scientists studying political involvement frequently ignore these three dimensions. Instead they tend to focus on just one dimension: participation. Even that dimension often is narrowed down to citizen participation in the electoral process: voting, helping in campaigns, and perhaps even running for office. But our purposes require that we take the broader view.

To understand the socio-civic beliefs, values and behavior of American youth today, we need to look at political affect, political cognition, and political participation, and we will do so in that order.

Political Affect

Political affect refers to states of feeling, and it manifests itself in loyalty to the polity and affection for the system. Research tells us that, in general, dislike of the political system is much rarer than love for it, especially if one has lived under no other system. Piaget, and others, in their studies of Swiss children, noted that they felt positively toward their country, even though their feelings were virtually content- and information-free.⁴

Easton and Dennis, Greenstein, Hess, Torney-Purta and many other researchers have made similar observations about young children in the United States. And while more recent research has revealed much more variation in positive affect (especially among minorities and the poor) than was originally assumed to exist, the fact that pure affect predates knowledge, comprehension, and action is still agreed upon. But the questions are: 1) does this affect persist into adolescence, and 2) do present day American youth feel affection for their country?

The 1981 Norman-Harris survey of over 160,000 13 to 18 year olds found that nine out of every ten teenagers have positive feelings about the United States, and that figure was consistent regardless of age, race or gender.⁵ They asked:

Do you think the United States is:

The best country in the world, even though it is not perfect	52%	90%
Okay	38%	
Not as good as some others		10%

Source: Norman-Harris Survey of 13 to 18 year-olds. (1981)

In that same year, 1981, the Roper Poll asked Americans of all ages a very similar question.⁶ The response was consistent regardless of age.

Question: Earlier on in American history, many people around the world thought the United States was the very best place in the world to live. Do you think it still is, or not?

Still the best place to live	90%
Is not	8%

Source: Roper Poll (1981)

In 1982, the Gallup Organization conducted a transnational "Value System Study" which provided some comparative data on generalized feelings of pride or affect.⁷ Once again, Americans indicated their support for the political system in general.

How proud are you to be ... (e.g., an American, Italian, Spaniard, etc.)?

Percent Saying "Very Proud":

United States	80%
Ireland	66%
Great Britain	55%
Spain	49%
Italy	41%
All Europe average	38%
France	33%
Japan	30%
West Germany	22%

Source: Gallup for the European Value System Study (1982)

Would the positive feelings which most American youth have toward their country extend to fighting for it? Both the Norman Harris⁸ and Gallup organizations⁹ posed that question. Here are the responses elicited.

Would you fight for your country?

Yes, if it went to war for any reason	21%	
Yes, if it went to defend another country	7%	76%
Yes, if it were attacked	48%	
No, never		24%

Source: Norman-Harris Survey of 13 to 18 year olds (1981)

Question: Of course, we all hope that there will not be another war, but if it were to come to that, would you be willing to fight for your country?

"YES"

United States	71%
Great Britain	62%
Spain	53%
Ireland	49%
All Europe average	43%
France	42%
West Germany	35%
Italy	28%
Japan	22%

Source: Gallup for the European Value System Study (1982)

Willingness to fight for one's country is, of course, just one subdimension of political affect. There are other and perhaps more significant subdimensions, such as satisfaction with government policies or confidence in institutions. The Gallup Organization has been measuring public confidence in American institutions since 1973. The results of its most recently published poll show that the public's confidence in the nation's most important institutions is no higher today than it was more than a decade ago in the days of Watergate. What is more, the poll showed that the current views of young adults (18 to 29 years old) are strikingly similar to those of persons thirty and over in the case of five of the institutions tested, and in some cases lower. Here is an abbreviated report of the Gallup Confidence in Institutions Survey conducted in August 1983.¹⁰

"I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Would you please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one -- a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little."

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Great Deal or Quite a Lot</u>
The Church or organized religion	
National	62%
18-29 years	55%
The Military	
National	53%
18-29 years	49%
Banks and banking	
National	51%
18-29 years	46%
U.S. Supreme Court	
National	42%
18-29 years	47%
Public Schools	
National	39%
18-29 years	34%
Newspapers	
National	38%
18-29 years	45%
Congress	
National	28%
18-29 years	29%

Big Business	
National	28%
18-29 years	31%
Organized Labor	
National	26%
18-29 years	23%
Television	
National	25%
18-29 years	23%

Source: The Gallup Poll Survey #220-G - Interviewing date 8/5-8/83

Data such as that just presented, which indicates generally low levels of confidence in most American institutions, raises an interesting question: how can American youth be both prideful and supportive of their government and distrustful of its major institutions? Political researchers explain that seeming dichotomy in this way: they contend that the subdimensions of affect usually are seen as distinct from one another by young people. The general pride or affect which they have for the system, therefore, seems to allow them to be comfortable in their criticisms of government policies and to be critical of specific institutions. Even the young who have hostile feelings about government as it currently is being administered still can have feelings of warmth or affect for the political system as a whole.

Political Cognition

In a democracy, political cognition is an especially crucial dimension. Democracies are dependent upon a citizenry whose knowledge encompasses three essential elements:

1. Factual information about public affairs and the workings of the political system;
2. Awareness of the important socio-political issues of the time;
3. Comprehension of the basic principles upon which democracy is based.

Despite the fact that political cognition is generally considered a prerequisite for effective citizenship, very little research has been done on political knowledge. The paucity of research on political knowledge stands in contrast to the growing body of literature on political attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Even so, the few recent studies of political knowledge tend to corroborate the findings of earlier ones. Their results show that the best single predictor of political knowledge is interest in politics. Interest in politics, however, often is lagging.

Two recent studies testify to lagging interest among students in general and female students in particular. One was conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research in 1980.¹¹ It was a nationwide survey of more than 16,000 high school seniors. Only 36% of them professed "great or a lot of interest" in government and current affairs.

Question: Some people think about what's going on in government very often and others are not that interested. How much of an interest do you take in government and current affairs?

	Total	Male	Female	White	Black
Great interest	12.0	17.4	6.9	11.3	15.0
A lot of interest	24.1	27.0	21.7	25.0	21.9
Some interest	44.6	40.7	48.4	45.4	36.9
Very little interest	15.3	11.4	18.7	14.8	21.6
No interest	3.9	3.4	3.3	3.6	4.7

Source: Survey Research Center - University of Michigan (1980)

James Mackey of the University of Minnesota conducted another study in 1982. It encompassed 39 communities and 4,500 students. Mackey reported that "ten classes of 12th grade students from an affluent school, when asked if they thought that 'politics is very boring', agreed two to one." Mackey also found that lack of interest, even apoliticism, "appears to be growing more rapidly among females from affluent suburban communities."¹²

Comparing the results of studies, surveys, or reports on political information is difficult, because each of them uses different items. Most studies, however, have found that few young people rank in the upper quartiles on any knowledge measure. Even so, Jennings and Nieni insist that if young people are compared with their parents, "Neither students nor parents had a decided advantage in knowledge over the other."¹³ Sigel and Hoskin came to much the same conclusion. They hold that students' "factual information about current events and public officials was not high in absolute terms, but it did not compare unfavorably to the information

levels of similarly educated adults."¹⁴ Adults and youth alike know such prominent figures as the vice-president of the United States and the governor of their state. But both are far less well-informed about their representatives, whether in the Senate, House of Representatives, or state legislatures.

Knowledge about international affairs is highly variable. Both adults and youth are familiar with events and people who have been featured on television newscasts or who have been in the headlines for some time, but they are uninformed on less prominently featured events and personalities. One study of high school seniors, for example, found that 76 percent of them were able to identify Ireland as the nation where Protestants and Catholics were fighting each other, but only 27 percent could identify India's Prime Minister.¹⁵

How aware are young people of the vital issues which face the nation? Recent studies suggest that adults are more attuned than ever. Some of this awareness may be attributable to the increase in "single issue citizens" who devote their interest and energy to just one "cause" such as the environment, disarmament, abortion, school prayer, or gun control. But the evidence is as yet far from conclusive that the proliferation of single issue groups has heightened issue awareness. Even so, high school seniors and college students appear to be equally issue-conscious and they are showing considerable sensitivity to the pressing problems of the day. What is more, their assessment of the seriousness of national problems bears a marked resemblance to the rankings of older persons.

There is a striking unanimity of opinion among Americans as to the problems facing the country. Blacks and whites, young and old, rich and poor, residents of the frostbelt and those of the sunbelt nearly all give the same responses....Economic issues continue in the forefront of public concern, as they have for the last ten years. International affairs, including the threat of war, and social issues, such as crime, are only secondarily important to the public as compared to issues of the economy. In general, people say they are dissatisfied with how things are going for the country; but this is nothing new, and the assessment has not changed much during the Reagan administration. On a more positive note, Americans are optimistic that better times are ahead for the country.¹⁵

The Gallup Poll of 1982 tends to confirm the Urban Institute's analysis.

Question: "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?"

	Response (%)										
	Unemployment	Inflation	The Economy	High Interest Rates	Excessive Government Spending	Reagan Budget Cuts	Dissatisfaction 'with Government	Fear of War	Crime	Moral Decline in Society	Foreign Relations
Age											
Total under 30 years	58	18	11	3	4	3	3	5	1	3	1
30-49 years	63	19	15	5	4	3	2	2	3	4	2
Total 50 years or older	62	16	8	4	2	4	3	3	4	3	2
Income											
\$25,000 and over	59	19	14	4	5	2	2	3	3	3	2
\$20,000-\$24,999	63	17	11	8	2	*	*	1	2	5	1
\$15,000-\$19,999	61	15	12	3	4	5	4	2	4	3	2
\$10,000-\$14,999	63	17	13	5	4	2	5	4	2	2	2
\$5,000-\$9,999	64	17	7	1	4	4	2	5	5	3	2
Under \$5,000	60	19	5	2	1	9	4	1	1	1	3

SOURCE: Gallup Poll, October 15-18, 1982.

NOTE: Other problems mentioned included military budgets (2%), the recession (1%), energy problems (1%), and others (2%).

*Less than one percent.

Comprehension of the basic principles on which democracy is based is undoubtedly the most critical element in political cognition. As Sigel and Hoskin observe:

...Comprehension of democratic principles is crucial, since these principles must help guide the citizen toward the solution of major political problems. For example, if a citizen fails to understand how principles such as freedom of speech relate to democracy, his solution for the treatment of dissenters becomes highly idiosyncratic, depending more on his personal attitude toward a given dissenter (or subject of dissent) than on any guiding principle.¹⁷

American high school seniors, however, often experience difficulty when they try to articulate what those basic principles mean. In the Rutgers University Study, for example, students were given a hypothetical situation of having a student from a nondemocratic country ask them to explain what makes a country a democracy. The explanations which most high school seniors gave revealed that they associated

democracy with one or another key concepts or practices. They referred most frequently to individual freedoms such as freedom of religion, speech, travel or career choice. Or they equated democracy with the right of the people to participate in government. Further probing in interview situations revealed a lack of true comprehension. The students simply used key words or slogans which they associated with the term "democracy".¹⁷

Question: Assume you've been asked to show a foreign student who just arrived in this country around your school. He has never been outside his country before and is very interested in our form of government. His country is not considered a democracy, and he asks you: "What is it that makes any country a democracy?" What would you say?

<u>Descriptive Category</u>	<u>Percentage Mentioning It</u>
Individual freedoms	48
Equality	1
Voice in government	37
Miscellaneous	6
Don't know	9

(N = 992)

Source: Descriptive Views of Democracy. The Political Involvement of Adolescents (1981)

As desirable as having citizens comprehend the basic principles of democracy may be, comprehension is no guarantee that they will seek democratic solutions to conflict situations. To do that they must not only know the democratic solution; they must prefer it to all others, and they must be willing to participate in the various political arenas of which they are a part -- school, volunteer groups, community, state and nation.

Political Participation

It is important at the outset of this discussion of the political participation of American youth that the meaning of the term political participation be understood in its broader, more modern sense. Early studies of participation paid little attention to the many ways in which citizens, and particularly young citizens, can and do participate in democratic societies.

Unfortunately, as Dennis Thompson observed in 1970, "Most studies have seen participation within the context-of electoral politics. This participation has come to be defined as voting and perhaps as voting plus some additional campaign activity."¹⁸ But that narrower conception has given way to a broader, more inclusive, and more realistic one. Today political scientists generally accept definitions of political participation which encompass not only those interactions which involve government directly or indirectly, but those interactions which citizens have with a wide variety of groups, movements, causes and community.

In the United States, youth, like adults, are politically active in a variety of arenas. Most research, however, suggests that the school is the arena most likely to attract student participation, and the fact that it does is not too surprising. In American high schools, the leadership skills of young people are developed, group pressures are exerted, and interaction with authorities is an everyday occurrence. The Rutgers University Study of high school seniors found that almost two-thirds of all students were active in at least one organized school activity. What is more, almost every one of them described themselves as being active or very active in them, but only 24 percent held an office of any kind in the organizations to which they belonged. Most students were content to be "joiners" rather than leaders. It is interesting to note, however, that the 1984 study of students entering college as first-time, full-time freshman shows an increasing tendency among the young to assume top leadership posts in school organizations. That tendency was particularly marked among females.

Activities in the Past Year

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Was President of one or more student organizations	27.9%	31.5%	29.7%
Edited school paper, yearbook, or magazine	12.7%	22.7%	17.9%

Source: The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall, 1984

The second arena most likely to attract student participation is in the work force. Although economic activity is not political participation per se, most researchers feel that the increasing numbers of teenagers who now have jobs represent an important change in their social values. According to recent

statistics, 42 percent of all high school sophomores are employed part time.²⁰ The number of seniors who work has increased to three out of five, or 63 percent.²¹ Not only do more adolescents work, but they now work more hours. For example, 56 percent of male students with jobs worked more than fourteen hours a week. Further, those who work are not drawn exclusively from lower socio-economic groups. The Wall Street Journal recently featured a series of articles on children between 14 and 22 years old whose fathers are senior executives in companies with sales of \$70 million or more. The Journal interviewed 313 young people, and learned that "Eighty-five percent of the executive children said they earned money by working outside the home, including 75 percent of those between the ages of 14 and 17 years."²²

Commenting on the increasing numbers of young Americans who work, Michael Borus, head of the Ohio State University Center for Human Resources, said:

The social norm in high school now is that you work. In my opinion, this represents to some extent a change in the social values of the kids. They want money to get independence. But their working may in itself be a function of other changes -- their school work doesn't take up all their time, and the whole family is work-oriented now.²³

Some political analysts see youth's preoccupation with work as evidence of increasing materialism. Alexander Astin, Director of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, summarized the findings of the 1984 survey of entering college students in this way:

In the area of personal values, the 1984-85 freshmen are more interested in making money than any other class in the history of the survey. All-time highs were reached in the percentages of students who say that a "very important" reason for attending college is "to be able to make more money" (67.8 percent compared to 66.7 percent last year and 49.9 percent in 1971), and who feel that "being well-off financially" is a "very important goal" in life (71.2 percent, up from 69.3 percent last year and only 39.1 percent in 1970). Relative to 17 other personal values, being very well-off financially has risen from ninth to second place since 1970.²⁴

Dr. Astin goes on to say that "this continuing trend toward greater materialism is consistent with changes in the students' career plans. The percentage of students aspiring to careers in business reached a record high in the current survey: 22.2 percent, compared to 20.4 percent last year and only 11.6 percent in the 1966 survey."²⁵

The allegation that American youth are becoming increasingly materialistic may be correct, but there is evidence from other sources which appears to temper such a conclusion. In the University of Michigan Survey of 16,000 high school seniors, this question was posed:

Question: If you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you'd like for the rest of your life, would you want to work?

I would want to work	82 %
I would not want to work	17.8%

Source: Survey Research Center - University of Michigan (1980)

Apparently high school seniors, like their elders, attached other and more significant values to work rather than seeing it as just a means to enjoy a comfortable existence.

Further evidence that American youth are not motivated solely by their desire for financial gain comes from their rather impressive record for volunteer work. The Rutgers University Study of 16,000 high school seniors reports that 72 percent of the students had collected for charitable organizations, while 59 percent took part in church-related community services activities.²⁶ Similar figures come from the American Freshman study of 1984, in which 69.8 percent of all incoming collegians reported the performance of volunteer work. Interestingly enough, the record for public service was almost equal between men and women, with 68 percent of the males and 71 percent of the females indicating that they had been volunteers.²⁷

Another indication of the more altruistic feelings of American youth is their attitude toward national service. A nationwide telephone survey of over 1,000 teenagers conducted by the Gallup Poll and the Charles F. Kettering Foundation in 1978 revealed that "An overwhelming majority (of) adolescents say they are willing to perform community service, such as working in a hospital or recreation center,

beautifying parks, or helping law enforcement officers, if given course credit. Many would even perform community service without credit, if approached in the proper way."²⁸

More current surveys indicate that the attitudes of youth toward public service have not changed. A small survey of 300 black high school students in Georgia, completed in 1984, showed that a majority (52 percent) of both students and their parents favored earning school credits for approved service to their community. In passing, it might be noted that only 26 percent of their teachers shared those sentiments.²⁹

Franklin Thomas, President of the Ford Foundation, recently addressed the question of national service. Franklin pointed out that "the most recent (1984) Gallup Poll reports that two-thirds of the American people approve a system of national service. There is a majority in favor, even among those who would be most affected, young people aged eighteen to twenty-four."³⁰

Before we look at voting patterns and participation in political campaigns, the most traditionally measured aspects of political participation, let's examine the political labels which young people attach to themselves and see what, if anything, they mean. As John Robinson, head of the University of Maryland's Survey Research Center, reminds us:

Careful studies of the (American) public's political beliefs and ideology show one thing consistently: the public does not often think about politics in ideological terms.... Moral issues, rather than political issues, most often divide the ideological extremes.... But what has happened since the 1980 election? Has the country become more conservative? The answer from the poll data appears to be "Perhaps, but not much."³¹

Robinson's observations are borne out in the 1984 college freshman survey. When students were asked to describe their political views, here is how they responded:

<u>Political Views</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Total</u>
Far left	2.4%	1.6%	2.0%
Liberal	19.1%	21.1%	20.1%
Middle of the road	53.7%	60.8%	57.4%
Conservative	23.0%	15.7%	19.3%

Source: The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall (1984)

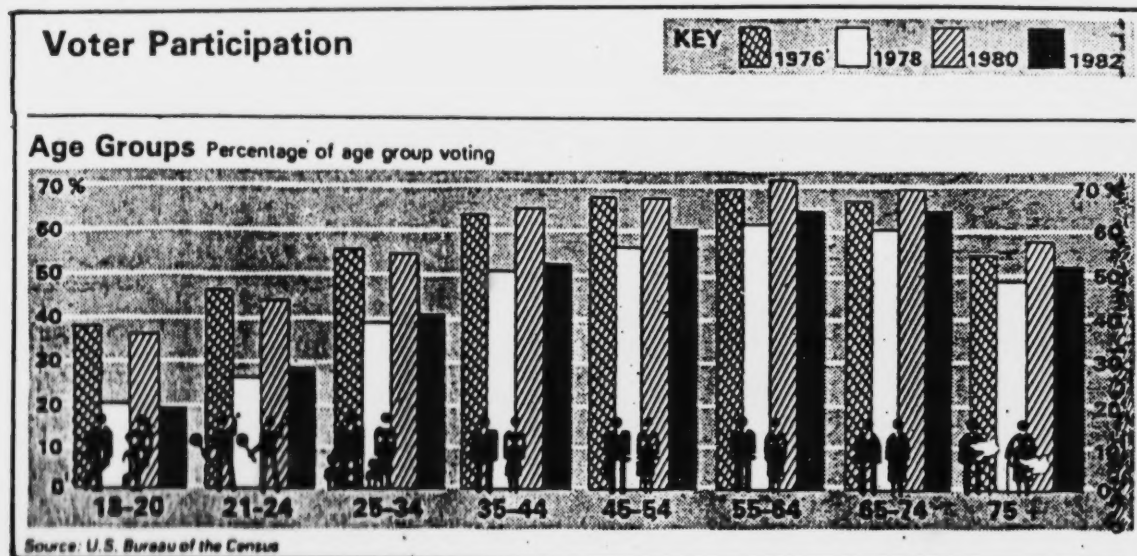
The political labels which Americans attach to themselves need to be regarded with caution. Over the last two decades, educational psychologists Fred Kerlinger and E. J. Pedhazur have conducted several surveys which reveal that endorsement of a liberal stand on one issue does not guarantee rejection of a conservative stand on another issue. Many people in the United States score just as high (or low) on the liberal scale as they do on the conservative scale.

The 1984 college freshman survey supports Kerlinger and Pedhazur's conclusion. Students' views presently reflect a strong mixture of both liberal and conservative trends in their political and social attitudes. On the liberal side, support for busing as a means of achieving racial balance reached an all-time high. Similarly, student support for a national health care plan "to cover everybody's medical costs" also reached an all-time high. Support for the view that "the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family" reached an all-time low, while support for the idea that "college officials have the right to ban persons with extreme views from speaking on campus" also reached its lowest point.

On the conservative side, student support for the legalization of marijuana continued to decline. Support for abolishing the death penalty also dropped to its lowest point in the history of the survey. The majority of freshmen still support higher taxes for the wealthy and greater governmental efforts to protect consumers, promote energy conservation, and control environmental pollution. However, student support for such governmental activities is at or near its lowest point in the 19-year history of the survey. Alexander Astin, Director of the American Freshman Survey, interprets those results in this way:

These mixed liberal and conservative trends show no monolithic trend toward greater student conservatism, as many pundits suggested during the recent (1984) presidential election. Today's students are highly selective in their attitudes on social issues: while being more conservative on matters of taxes, crime, and drug use, they are more liberal than ever on matters of equality for women, school integration, and students' rights.³²

Young Americans may hold strong views on a variety of issues, but they do not express them with regularity in the polling booths of the nation. In that respect, youth are like their elders, only more so. Voter turnout for all Americans does not compare favorably with turnout in other nations. An international survey conducted by the American Enterprise Institute revealed that, based on mean voter turnout since 1945, the United States logged a 58.5 percent election turnout -- 20th place of all the democracies.³³ United States Bureau of the Census figures show that 18 to 20 year olds log less than a 40 percent turnout, while 21 to 24 year olds do only slightly better.



Political scientists are puzzled by the comparatively low levels of electoral turnout. Some, like Dennis Kavanagh, attribute the problem more to indifference than to alienation.

...Surveys show that levels of political interest, information, and sense of duty to vote are as high as ever. In addition, people now enjoy higher education and high socio-economic status, factors which should increase turnout. But offsetting these trends, there has been a decline in sense of efficacy, trust in the government and parties, and perceived responsiveness of the political elites. These negative factors seem to be important in depressing the level of voter turnout. Similarly, in Britain the non-voters are poorly motivated and seem to be more politically apathetic than alienated. They tend to be young, single, not to own a home, and to have moved recently, all factors which weaken their links to the community.³⁴

The proportion of the voting age population who voted in the 1984 presidential election did increase slightly. Preliminary figures, interestingly enough, show that the greatest gains occurred among young black voters between the ages of 18 and 24. A Census Bureau survey showed that 53.7 percent of the 3.9 million blacks in that age group registered, and 40 percent of them said they voted. In 1980, 41 percent of young blacks registered, and 30 percent cast ballots. By contrast, the Census Bureau poll showed little or no difference in voter registrations and turnout for white voters between 1980 and 1984.³⁵

Conclusion

This discussion, at best, has only scratched the surface of what could be and perhaps should have been said about the socio-civic values of American youth. It seems appropriate, however, that we let youth have the last word.

On the threshold of adulthood, what are the objectives which young people themselves consider essential or very important? Drawing once again on the data which they supplied in the American Freshman Survey, we discover that they, like most of us, have some goals which are personal and pragmatic - and they are up front about

them. The great majority would like to be well-off financially and to be successful in their own businesses. They would like to raise families. They want to be recognized one day as authorities in their fields, and they would like to have that recognition come from their colleagues.

Youth also have some other goals in mind, but at the moment they seem less pressing. Among those goals are developing a philosophy of life, helping others who are in difficulty, and keeping up with political affairs.

We need, however, to caution ourselves against looking only at what the majority of youth are thinking or the objectives toward which they are striving. We need to pay attention as well to the lesser numbers of youth whose socio-civic values prompt them to dream of cleaning up the environment, participating in community action, making a contribution to scientific theory, writing original works, influencing social values, and even influencing the political structure. Their dreams may yet be realized.

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Fig. 1: Trends in Freshman Political Preferences, 1969-1984

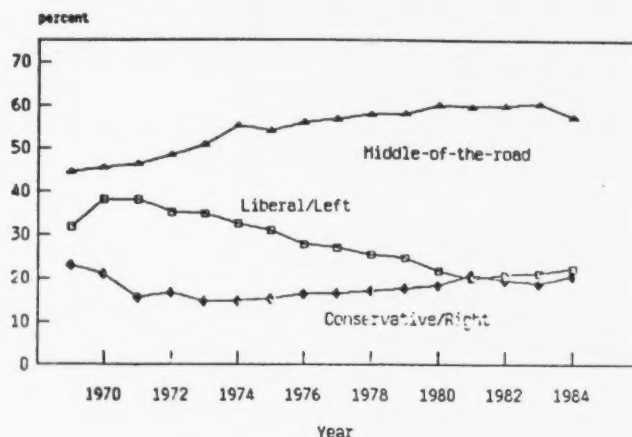


Fig. 2: Freshman Attitudes on Political and Social Issues (percentage who agree or strongly agree)

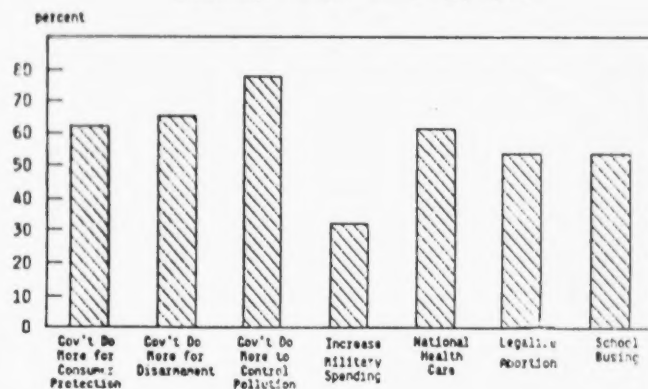
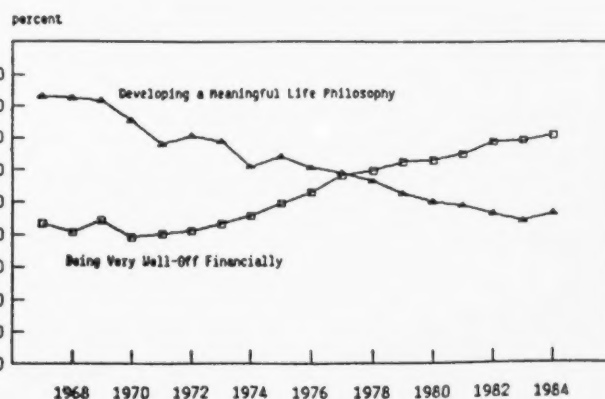


Fig. 4: Trends in Student Objectives, 1967-1984



SOURCE: The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1984
 Cooperative Institutional Research Program
 American Council on Education/University of California at Los Angeles